

First Kings

Scripture: 1 Kings

Code: MSB11

Title

First and Second Kings were originally one book, called in the Hebrew text, “Kings,” from the first word in 1:1. The Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint (LXX), divided the book in two, and this was followed by the Latin Vulgate (Vg.) version and English translations. The division was for the convenience of copying this lengthy book on scrolls and codexes and was not based on features of content. Modern Hebrew Bibles title the books “Kings A” and “Kings B.” The LXX and Vg. connected Kings with the books of Samuel, so that the titles in the LXX are “The Third and Fourth Books of Kingdoms” and in the Vg. “Third and Fourth Kings.” The books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings combined are a chronicle of the entire history of Judah’s and Israel’s kingship from Saul to Zedekiah. First and Second Chronicles provides only the history of Judah’s monarchy.

Author and Date

Jewish tradition proposed that Jeremiah wrote Kings, though this is unlikely because the final event recorded in the book (see 2 Kin. 25:27–30) occurred in Babylon in 561 B.C. Jeremiah never went to Babylon, but to Egypt (Jer. 43:1–7), and would have been at least 86 years old by 561 B.C. Actually, the identity of the unnamed author remains unknown. Since the ministry of prophets is emphasized in Kings, it seems that the author was most likely an unnamed prophet of the Lord who lived in exile with Israel in Babylon.

Kings was written between 561–538 B.C. Since the last narrated event (2 Kin. 25:27–30) sets the earliest possible date of completion and because there is no record of the end of the Babylonian captivity in Kings, the release from exile (538 B.C.) identifies the latest possible writing date. This date is sometimes challenged on the basis of “to this day” statements in 1 Kin. 8:8; 9:13, 20, 21; 10:12; 12:19; 2 Kin. 2:22; 8:22; 10:27; 14:7; 16:6; 17:23, 34, 41; 21:15. However, it is best to understand these statements as those of the sources used by the author, rather than statements of the author himself.

It is clear that the author used a variety of sources in compiling this book, including “the book of the acts of Solomon” (1 Kin. 11:41), “the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (1 Kin. 14:19; 15:31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:39; 2 Kin. 1:18; 10:34; 13:8, 12; 14:15, 28; 15:11, 15, 21, 26, 31), and “the chronicles of the kings of Judah” (1 Kin. 14:29; 15:7, 23; 22:45; 2 Kin. 8:23; 12:19; 14:18; 15:6, 36; 16:19; 20:20;

21:17, 25; 23:28; 24:5). Further, Is. 36:1–39:8 provided information used in 2 Kin. 18:9–20:19, and Jer. 52:31–34 seems to be the source for 2 Kin. 25:27–29. This explanation posits a single inspired author, living in Babylon during the Exile, using these pre-Exilic source materials at his disposal.

Background and Setting

A distinction must be made between the setting of the books' sources and that of the books' author. The source material was written by participants in and eyewitnesses of the events. It was reliable information, which was historically accurate concerning the sons of Israel, from the death of David and the accession of Solomon (971 B.C.) to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Babylonians (586 B.C.). Thus, Kings traces the histories of two sets of kings and two nations of disobedient people, Israel and Judah, both of whom were growing indifferent to God's law and His prophets and were headed for captivity.

The book of Kings is not only accurate history, but interpreted history. The author, an exile in Babylon, wished to communicate the lessons of Israel's history to the exiles. Specifically, he taught the exilic community why the Lord's judgment of exile had come. The writer established early in his narrative that the Lord required obedience by the kings to the Mosaic law, if their kingdom was to receive His blessing; disobedience would bring exile (1 Kin. 9:3–9). The sad reality that history revealed was that all the kings of Israel and the majority of the kings of Judah "did evil in the sight of the LORD." These evil kings were apostates, who led their people to sin by not confronting idolatry, but sanctioning it. Because of the kings' failure, the Lord sent His prophets to confront both the monarchs and the people with their sin and their need to return to Him. Because the message of the prophets was rejected, the prophets foretold that the nation(s) would be carried into exile (2 Kin. 17:13–23; 21:10–15). Like every prophecy uttered by the prophets in Kings, this word from the Lord came to pass (2 Kin. 17:5, 6; 25:1–11). Therefore, Kings interpreted the people's experience of exile and helped them to see why they had suffered God's punishment for idolatry. It also explained that just as God had shown mercy to Ahab (1 Kin. 22:27–29) and Jehoiachin (2 Kin. 25:27–30), so He was willing to show them mercy.

The predominant geographical setting of Kings is the whole Land of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba (1 Kin. 4:25), including Transjordan. Four invading nations played a dominant role in the affairs of Israel and Judah from 971 to 561 B.C. In the tenth century B.C., Egypt impacted Israel's history during the reigns of Solomon and Rehoboam (1 Kin. 3:1; 1:14–22, 40; 12:2; 14:25–27). Syria (Aram) posed a great threat to Israel's security during the ninth century B.C., ca. 890–800 B.C. (1 Kin. 15:9–22; 20:1–34; 22:1–4, 29–40; 2 Kin. 6:8–7:20; 8:7–15; 10:32, 33; 12:17–18; 13:22–25). The years from ca. 800–750 B.C. were a half-century of peace and prosperity for Israel and Judah, because Assyria neutralized Syria and did not threaten to the south. This changed during the kingship of Tiglath-Pileser III (2 Kin. 15:19, 20, 29). From the mid-eighth century to the late seventh century B.C., Assyria terrorized Palestine, finally conquering and destroying Israel (the northern kingdom) in 722 B.C. (2

Kin. 17:4–6) and besieging Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (2 Kin. 18:17–19:37). From 612 to 539 B.C., Babylon was the dominant power in the ancient world. Babylon invaded Judah (the southern kingdom) 3 times, with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple occurring in 586 B.C. during that third assault (2 Kin. 24:1–25:21).

Historical and Theological Themes

Kings concentrates, then, on the history of the sons of Israel from 971 to 561 B.C. First Kings 1:1–11:43 deals with Solomon's accession and reign (971–931 B.C.). The two divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah (931–722 B.C.) are covered in 1 Kin. 12:1; 2 Kin. 17:41. The author arranged the material in a distinctive way in that the narration follows the kings in both the N and the S. For each reign described, there is the following literary framework. Every king is introduced with: 1) his name and relation to his predecessor; 2) his date of accession in relationship to the year of the contemporary ruler in the other kingdom; 3) his age on coming to the throne (for kings of Judah only); 4) his length of reign; 5) his place of reign; 6) his mother's name (for Judah only); and 7) spiritual appraisal of his reign. This introduction is followed by a narration of the events that occurred during the reign of each king. The details of this narration vary widely. Each reign is concluded with: 1) a citation of sources; 2) additional historical notes; 3) notice of death; 4) notice of burial; 5) the name of the successor; and 6) in a few instances, an added postscript (i.e., 1 Kin. 15:32; 2 Kin. 10:36). Second Kings 18:1–25:21 deals with the time when Judah survived alone (722–586 B.C.). Two concluding paragraphs speak of events after the Babylonian exile (2 Kin. 25:22–26, 27–30).

Three theological themes are stressed in Kings. First, the Lord judged Israel and Judah because of their disobedience to His law (2 Kin 17:7–23). This unfaithfulness on the part of the people was furthered by the apostasy of the evil kings who led them into idolatry (2 Kin. 17:21, 22; 21:11), so the Lord exercised His righteous wrath against His rebellious people. Second, the word of the true prophets came to pass (1 Kin. 13:2, 3; 22:15–28; 2 Kin. 23:16; 24:2). This confirmed that the Lord did keep His Word, even His warnings of judgment. Third, the Lord remembered His promise to David (1 Kin. 11:12–13, 34–36; 15:4; 2 Kin. 8:19). Even though the kings of the Davidic line proved themselves to be disobedient to the Lord, He did not bring David's family to an end as He did the families of Jeroboam I, Omri, and Jehu in Israel. Even as the book closes, the line of David still exists (2 Kin. 25:27–30), so there is hope for the coming "seed" of David (see 2 Sam. 7:12–16). The Lord is thus seen as faithful, and His Word is trustworthy.

Interpretive Challenges

The major interpretive challenge in Kings concerns the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah. Though abundant chronological data is presented in the book of Kings, this data is difficult to interpret for two reasons. First, there seems to be internal inconsistency in the information given. For instance,

1 Kin. 16:23 states that Omri, king of Israel, began to reign in the 31st year of Asa, king of Judah, and that he reigned 12 years. But according to 1 Kin. 16:29, Omri was succeeded by his son Ahab in the 38th year of Asa, giving Omri a reign of only 7 years, not 12. Second, from extrabiblical sources (Greek, Assyrian, and Babylonian), correlated with astronomical data, a reliable series of dates can be calculated from 892 to 566 B.C. Since Ahab and Jehu, kings of Israel, are believed to be mentioned in Assyrian records, 853 B.C. can be fixed as the year of Ahab's death and 841 B.C. as the year Jehu began to reign. With these fixed dates, it is possible to work backward and forward to determine that the date of the division of Israel from Judah was ca. 931 B.C., the fall of Samaria 722 B.C., and the fall of Jerusalem 586 B.C. But when the total years of royal reigns in Kings are added, the number for Israel is 241 years (not the 210 years of 931 to 722 B.C.) and Judah 393 years (not the 346 years of 931 to 586 B.C.). It is recognized that in both kingdoms there were some co-regencies, i.e., a period of rulership when two kings, usually father and son, ruled at the same time, so the overlapping years were counted twice in the total for both kings. Further, different methods of reckoning the years of a king's rule and even different calendars were used at differing times in the two kingdoms, resulting in the seeming internal inconsistencies. The general accuracy of the chronology in Kings can be demonstrated and confirmed.

A second major interpretive challenge deals with Solomon's relationship to the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. First Kings 4:20, 21 has been interpreted by some as the fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:18–21; 22:17). However, according to Num. 34:6, the western border of the Land promised to Abraham was the Mediterranean Sea. In 1 Kin. 5:1ff., Hiram is seen as the independent king of Tyre (along the Mediterranean), dealing with Solomon as an equal. Solomon's empire was not the fulfillment of the Land promise given to Abraham by the Lord, although a great portion of that land was under Solomon's control. Further, the statements of Solomon in 1 Kin. 5:5 and 8:20 are his claims to be the promised seed of the Davidic Covenant (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12–16). The author of Kings holds out the possibility that Solomon's temple was the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to David. However, while the conditions for the fulfillment of the promise to David are reiterated to Solomon (1 Kin. 6:12), it is clear that Solomon did not meet these conditions (1 Kin. 11:9–13). In fact, none of the historical kings in the house of David met the condition of complete obedience that was to be the sign of the Promised One. According to Kings, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants did not take place in Israel's past, thus laying the foundation for the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve) who would point Israel to a future hope under Messiah when the Covenants would be fulfilled (see Is. 9:6, 7).

Outline

Since the division of 1 and 2 Kings arbitrarily takes place in the middle of the narrative concerning King Ahaziah in Israel, the following outline is for both 1 and 2 Kings.

I. The United Kingdom: The Reign of Solomon (1 Kin. 1:1–11:43)

- A. The Rise of Solomon (1 Kin. 1:1–2:46)
- B. The Beginning of Solomon's Wisdom and Wealth (1 Kin. 3:1–4:34)
- C. The Preparations for the Building of the Temple (1 Kin. 5:1–18)
- D. The Building of the Temple and Solomon's House (1 Kin. 6:1–9:9)
- E. The Further Building Projects of Solomon (1 Kin. 9:10–28)
- F. The Culmination of Solomon's Wisdom and Wealth (1 Kin. 10:1–29)
- G. The Decline of Solomon (1 Kin. 11:1–43)

II. The Divided Kingdom: The Kings of Israel and Judah (1 Kin. 12:1–2 Kin. 17:41)

- A. The Rise of Idolatry: Jeroboam of Israel/Rehoboam of Judah (1 Kin. 12:1–14:31)
- B. Kings of Judah/Israel (1 Kin. 15:1–16:22)
- C. The Dynasty of Omri and Its Influence: The Rise and Fall of Baal Worship in Israel and Judah (1 Kin. 16:23–2 Kin. 13:25)
 - 1. The introduction of Baal worship (1 Kin. 16:23–34)
 - 2. The opposition of Elijah to Baal worship (1 Kin. 17:1–2 Kin. 1:18)
 - 3. The influence of Elisha concerning the true God (2 Kin. 2:1–9:13)
 - 4. The overthrow of Baal worship in Israel (2 Kin. 9:14–10:36)
 - 5. The overthrow of Baal worship in Judah (2 Kin. 11:1–12:21)
 - 6. The death of Elisha (2 Kin. 13:1–25)
- D. Kings of Judah/Israel (2 Kin. 14:1–15:38)
- E. The Defeat and Exile of Israel by Assyria (2 Kin. 16:1–17:41)

III. The Surviving Kingdom: The Kings of Judah (2 Kin. 18:1–25:21)

A. Hezekiah's Righteous Reign (2 Kin. 18:1–20:21)

B. Manasseh's and Amon's Wicked Reigns (2 Kin. 21:1–26)

C. Josiah's Righteous Reign (2 Kin. 22:1–23:30)

D. The Defeat and Exile of Judah by Babylon (2 Kin. 23:31–25:21)

IV. Epilogue: The People's Continued Rebellion and the Lord's Continued Mercy (2 Kin. 25:22–30)

The Kings of Israel and Judah

KING

SCRIPTURE

United Kingdom

Saul 1 Samuel 9:1–31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:1–14

David 2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1:1–2:9; 1 Chronicles 11:1–29:30

Solomon 1 Kings 2:10–11:43; 2 Chronicles 1:1–9:31

Northern Kingdom (Israel)

Jeroboam I 1 Kings 12:25–14:20

Nadab 1 Kings 15:25–31

Baasha 1 Kings 15:32–16:7

Elah 1 Kings 16:8–14

Zimri	1 Kings 16:15–20
Tibni	1 Kings 16:21, 22
Omri	1 Kings 16:21–28
Ahab	1 Kings 16:29–22:40
Ahaziah	1 Kings 22:51–53; 2 Kings 1:1–18
Jehoram (Joram)	2 Kings 2:1–8:15
Jehu	2 Kings 9:1–10:36
Jehoahaz	2 Kings 13:1–9
Jehoash (Joash)	2 Kings 13:10–25
Jeroboam II	2 Kings 14:23–29
Zechariah	2 Kings 15:8–12
Shallum	2 Kings 15:13–15
Menahem	2 Kings 15:16–22
Pekahiah	2 Kings 15:23–26
Pekah	2 Kings 15:27–31
Hoshea	2 Kings 17:1–41
<i>Southern Kingdom (Judah)</i>	
Rehoboam	1 Kings 12:1–14:31; 2 Chronicles 10:1–12:16
Abijam (Abijah)	1 Kings 15:1–8; 2 Chronicles 13:1–22

Asa	1 Kings 15:9–24; 2 Chronicles 14:1–16:14
Jehoshaphat	1 Kings 22:41–50; 2 Chronicles 17:1–20:37
Joram (Jehoram)	2 Kings 8:16–24; 2 Chronicles 21:1–20
Ahaziah	2 Kings 8:25–29; 2 Chronicles 22:1–9
Athaliah (queen)	2 Kings 11:1–16; 2 Chronicles 22:1–23:21
Joash (Jehoash)	2 Kings 11:17–12:21; 2 Chronicles 23:16–24:27
Amaziah	2 Kings 14:1–22; 2 Chronicles 25:1–28
Uzziah (Azariah)	2 Kings 15:1–7; 2 Chronicles 26:1–23
Jotham	2 Kings 15:32–38; 2 Chronicles 27:1–9
Ahaz	2 Kings 16:1–20; 2 Chronicles 28:1–27
Hezekiah	2 Kings 18:1–20:21; 2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33
Manasseh	2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chronicles 33:1–20
Amon	2 Kings 21:19–26; 2 Chronicles 33:21–25
Josiah	2 Kings 22:1–23:30; 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:27
Jehoahaz	2 Kings 23:31–33; 2 Chronicles 36:1–4
Jehoiakim	2 Kings 23:34–24:7; 2 Chronicles 36:5–8
Jehoiachin	2 Kings 24:8–16; 2 Chronicles 36:9, 10
Zedekiah	2 Kings 24:18–25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:11–21

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